



Platformization, performative perfectionism, and creative stress among local independent musicians in Purwokerto

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received Jul 16, 2026

Revised Jul 27, 2026

Received Aug 08, 2026

Keywords:

Platformization;
Performative Perfectionism;
Creative Stress;
Independent Musicians;
Digital Music Ecosystem.

ABSTRACT

Digital platforms have transformed music production, promotion, distribution, and audience engagement, but their effects on local independent musicians remain underexplored. Previous studies have discussed platformization, digital music labor, perfectionism, music performance anxiety, royalties, and musicians' wellbeing separately. However, limited attention has been given to how platform-based visibility, content demands, cover culture, royalty uncertainty, and audience evaluation jointly reshape musical quality, performative perfectionism, and creative stress in local music ecosystems. This study examines how local independent musicians in Purwokerto negotiate platformization, artistic ideals, cover culture, royalties, performative perfectionism, and creative stress. Using a qualitative collective instrumental case study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three information-rich cases: Denny Alvian, Polkadots, and Aga/Hyndia. The data were analyzed thematically through the framework of platformization of cultural production. The findings show that digital platforms do not merely distribute songs; they reshape how songs are created, evaluated, promoted, and sustained. Musical quality is increasingly associated with hooks, short-form visibility, engagement, fanbase strength, content adaptability, and algorithmic circulation. Musicians negotiate platform demands while maintaining artistic identity and offline performance opportunities. Cover culture and royalties are interpreted as promotional opportunities, recognition mechanisms, and sources of economic uncertainty. Performative perfectionism emerges when musicians pursue artistic excellence, platform-oriented visibility, and audience approval. These pressures contribute to creative stress when intensive creative work does not produce predictable audience response, monetization, or stage opportunities. This study contributes to digital creative labor and music studies by showing how platformization transforms quality, recognition, perfection, and psychological pressure in a local independent music ecosystem.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital music has changed not only how songs are produced, promoted, and distributed, but also how quality and success are understood. In a platformized environment, songs become cultural commodities that can be optimized, repackaged, circulated, and reinterpreted according to platform logics. Nieborg and Poell (2018) argue that platformization makes cultural commodities increasingly contingent because they are shaped by platform infrastructures, multisided markets, governance mechanisms, user data, and monetization strategies.

This transformation is also visible in Indonesia's digital music ecosystem. Akil et al. (2024) show that digitalization changes music production, distribution, and consumption while also creating challenges such as piracy, unequal revenue distribution, and dependence on digital media. For independent musicians, this condition opens wider audience reach but also creates new obligations to manage social media, understand algorithms, produce content, build personal branding, maintain audience relations, and search for offline performance opportunities. This is consistent with Ng and Gamble's (2024) view that digital music labor is increasingly shaped by self-promotion, social media, and platform gatekeeping.

At the local level, independent musicians in Purwokerto face platform demands while dealing with limited support systems, audience preference for viral songs and cover performances, royalty uncertainty, and the need to maintain offline stage presence. As a result, musical quality is increasingly judged not only through originality, lyrics, melody, or arrangement, but also through visibility, engagement, algorithmic circulation, and viral potential.

This shift also changes the meaning of perfection in music. Perfectionism is often understood as the pursuit of flawless outcomes, but Goulet-Pelletier et al. (2022) distinguish healthy excellencism from rigid perfectionism. In musical contexts, Butković et al. (2022) and Racine et al. (2026) show that perfectionism is related to music performance anxiety, expected outcomes, negative affect, and performance pressure. Arbinaga (2023), Aubry and Küssner (2025), Miley et al. (2024), and Sun et al. (2026) further indicate that perfectionism, self-efficacy, personality traits, external pressure, professional music conditions, and emotional regulation shape musicians' psychological experiences. Flett et al. (2022) explain that socially prescribed perfectionism emerges when individuals feel pressured by their social environment to be perfect. In digital music, this pressure may be intensified by audience comments, likes, streams, shares, trending metrics, and algorithmic visibility.

Although previous studies have examined platformization, digital music labor, perfectionism, music performance anxiety, royalties, and musicians' wellbeing, these discussions remain relatively separated. Limited attention has been given to how platform-based visibility, content demands, cover culture, royalty uncertainty, and audience evaluation jointly shape performative perfectionism and creative stress among local independent musicians. This gap is important in Purwokerto, where musicians must manage artistic production, digital promotion, audience engagement, offline stage opportunities, community relations, and limited support systems simultaneously.

This study contributes to the literature by linking platformization of cultural production with performative perfectionism and creative stress in a local independent music ecosystem. The novelty lies in positioning performative perfectionism not merely as an individual psychological tendency, but as a platform-mediated condition shaped by visibility, content adaptability, algorithmic circulation, audience response, cover culture, royalty uncertainty, and career sustainability.

Therefore, this study addresses four research questions: how digital platforms reshape standards of musical quality and success among local independent musicians in Purwokerto; how these musicians negotiate artistic ideals, audience expectations, algorithmic visibility, and content strategies; how cover culture, royalties, and recognition

are interpreted within the local digital music ecosystem; and how performative perfectionism emerges and contributes to creative stress.

Conceptually, this study uses the platformization of cultural production as the main analytical framework. Platformization is understood through five dimensions: platform infrastructure, multisided markets, platform governance, datafication, and the contingency of cultural commodities. These dimensions explain how digital platforms reshape musical standards, content strategies, cover practices, recognition, royalties, performative perfectionism, and creative stress. In this framework, platform demands shape musical quality and success, influence the negotiation of artistic ideals and audience expectations, and produce performative perfectionism when musicians feel pressured to make works visible, adaptable, promotable, and acceptable within platform systems.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a collective instrumental case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand how platformization, performative perfectionism, cover culture, royalties, and creative stress are interpreted by independent musicians in everyday creative work. This is consistent with Sugiyono (2010), who explains that qualitative research examines natural objects with the researcher as the key instrument. A case study design was suitable because the research focused on a contemporary phenomenon in a real local music ecosystem. Following Crowe et al. (2011) and Greenhalgh (2025), case study research allows detailed, contextual, and holistic exploration of complex real-life issues.

The research context was the independent music ecosystem in Purwokerto, Indonesia, understood as a socio-digital space where musicians create songs, manage content, build audiences, perform offline, and distribute works through digital platforms. Purwokerto was selected because it represents a local music ecosystem outside major music industry centers, where independent musicians rely on self-managed promotion, community-based visibility, and hybrid digital-offline strategies.

Informants were selected purposively based on their active involvement in the local independent music ecosystem, experience in producing or performing music, use of digital platforms, engagement with audience response, and direct experience with creative pressure, cover culture, royalties, or digital visibility. The study involved three information-rich cases: Denny Alvian as an independent solo musician, Polkadots as a local band context, and Aga/Hyndia as a musician and creative leader. The three cases were considered sufficient because they represent different positions within the ecosystem: solo creative work, band-based collective work, and creative leadership. Data saturation was indicated when recurring patterns appeared across interviews, especially regarding platform demands, content strategies, audience evaluation, cover practices, royalty uncertainty, performative standards, and creative pressure.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. With informants' consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed thematically and manually. Following Ahmed et al. (2025) and Naeem et al. (2023), the analysis involved repeated reading, open coding, grouping similar codes into broader categories, and interpreting the categories through the framework of platformization, performative perfectionism, and creative stress. The main categories included platform standards, negotiation, content strategy, cover culture, royalties, performative perfectionism, and creative stress. To strengthen trustworthiness, the study used member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation across cases, reflexive notes, and an audit trail of coding decisions.

Table 1. Research informants

No.	Informant	Position/context	Relevance to the study
1	Denny Alvian	Independent solo musician	Solo songwriting, digital promotion, and audience response.
2	Polkadots	Local band	Collective music work, stage strategy, original songs, and cover culture.
3	Aga/Hyndia	Musician and creative leader	Creative direction, team coordination, visual production, and content strategy.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings are organized into six themes: musical quality, artistic negotiation, content strategy and offline performance, cover culture and royalties, performative perfectionism, and creative stress. These themes show how platformization affects not only song distribution but also quality, recognition, and sustainability.

3.1 Digital platforms and changing standards of musical quality

The first finding shows that digital platforms reshape the standards by which songs are considered good, attractive, relevant, and successful. Musical quality is no longer understood only through melody, lyrics, arrangement, sound character, or originality, but also through the ability of a song to attract attention quickly, circulate across platforms, and generate measurable audience response. Denny Alvian explained this shift by stating, “Kalau di digital sekarang, lagu itu harus langsung kena hook-nya. Dulu intro lagu bisa dua bar, empat bar, bahkan lebih. Sekarang enggak bisa.” He further emphasized that “lima belas detik pertama itu sangat menentukan apakah orang bakal lanjut mendengarkan atau langsung swipe.”

Polkadots showed a similar pattern from a band-based perspective. The informant explained, “Sekarang Spotify bukan lagi gerbang utama. Gerbang masuk utamanya justru TikTok. Ketika sebuah lagu viral di TikTok, otomatis orang akan mencarinya di Spotify.” This shows that digital platforms create layered listening pathways, where audiences may first encounter a fragment of a song on social media before listening to the full version on streaming platforms.

This finding supports Nieborg and Poell’s (2018) argument that cultural commodities become contingent in platform ecosystems. It also aligns with Raffa and Pronzato’s (2025) view that songs in the digital ecosystem move through an optimization cycle involving creation, platform mediation, and audience reception. In Purwokerto, this appears in musicians’ concern with hooks, short-form videos, audience metrics, fanbase strength, and content adaptability. Thus, platformization changes not only music circulation but also the meaning of quality itself.

3.2 Negotiating artistic ideals, audiences, and platform algorithms

The second finding shows that local independent musicians do not simply submit to algorithms, nor do they completely reject platform logic. They negotiate by adjusting works, promotional strategies, and content formats while still maintaining artistic identity. Denny Alvian’s reflection shows that idealism becomes conditional when musicians are still building listeners, audience reach, and market visibility.

Polkadots showed this negotiation clearly. The informant explained, “Sudah. Cuma kami tetap menjalankannya dengan cara kami sendiri. Tidak serta-merta langsung mengikuti semua tren. Kami lebih bermain dengan momentum.” Aga/Hyndia expressed a similar position by emphasizing that content is necessary, but it must still be based on the song itself: “Kita itu bukan content creator... pada akhirnya adalah kami membuat sebuah konten, tapi konten itu didasarkan oleh pada sebuah lagu.” These statements show that platform adaptation is selective and does not necessarily erase musical identity.

This negotiation illustrates platform governance because platforms shape visibility through recommendation systems, algorithmic curation, copyright rules, and monetization mechanisms (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). The finding also supports Ng and Gamble's (2024) argument that digital music labor is shaped by platform gatekeeping and musicians' self-promotional strategies. Therefore, negotiation becomes a central strategy for maintaining creative identity within a platformized music ecosystem.

3.3 Content strategies and the relationship between digital visibility and offline stages

The third finding indicates that digital platforms do not replace offline stages. Instead, digital visibility functions as a gateway to offline opportunities. Denny Alvian explained, "Tujuan utamaku memang penguin keliling manggung dengan lagu-laguku sendiri." He also emphasized that offline performance gives a different experience because musicians can directly feel audience energy: "Kalau manggung, semuanya terasa nyata. Vibes dan energinya benar-benar beda."

Aga/Hyndia explained that digital activity and offline performance must run together, especially for local bands with limited support systems. He stated, "Kita harus kreatif dalam arti mau enggak mau kita juga akan menjadi semi content creator, dalam arti cuma yang jadi basic adalah lagu kita." He further emphasized, "Selama offline itu tidak ada, sosmed kami harus tetap jalan." Polkadots also treats stage strategy carefully by limiting local performances to avoid audience saturation, showing that offline visibility must be managed alongside digital circulation.

This relationship reflects the multisided market dimension of platformization. The value of music is shaped by musicians, communities, listeners, event organizers, venues, platforms, content creators, and royalty institutions. This also aligns with Marković and Dabo's (2025) argument that social media is crucial for musician branding, visibility, and communication. Digital content may generate attention, but offline performance remains important for income, recognition, and direct audience connection.

3.4 Cover culture, royalties, and recognition of musical works

The fourth finding concerns cover culture, royalties, and recognition. The informants did not interpret cover practices only as threats. Polkadots explained that cover songs are not the band's main selling point, but may be used to attract audiences who are not yet familiar with the band's original songs. The informant stated, "Di Polkadot, lagu cover bukan senjata utama untuk jualan kami. Yang kami jual tetap karya sendiri." Aga/Hyndia also emphasized that song reuse should respect songwriters' rights, especially in commercial contexts.

Denny Alvian saw cover culture as part of the changing digital music ecosystem. He explained, "Bahkan sekarang dengan AI, semua orang bisa bikin lagu. Cover lagu juga semakin gampang. Itu juga jadi tantangan baru buat musisi." This statement shows that cover culture is part of a broader technological shift that affects how songs are reproduced, circulated, and recognized. In this sense, cover culture reflects the contingency of cultural commodities, where songs can be repackaged into covers, remixes, short sounds, live sessions, or user-generated content.

Royalties are interpreted not only as income but also as recognition and long-term investment. Polkadots stated, "Buat saya, royalti itu investasi." This view positions original songs as long-term creative assets. However, royalty systems still contain uncertainty, especially for local musicians with limited access to legal, institutional, and distribution knowledge. This finding supports Polcz (2023), Resmadi and Baulch (2024), and Wijayanti and Setiawati (2026), who argue that royalty distribution involves fairness, transparency, accountability, and conflict resolution.

3.5 Performative perfectionism in local music work

The fifth finding shows that perfectionism in local music work is not limited to the musician's internal desire to produce artistically strong songs. Perfectionism becomes performative when musicians feel that a work must also fit platform formats, produce engagement, satisfy audiences, and support career sustainability. Denny Alvian explained, "Aku memang lagi punya keresahan soal standar. Harusnya beberapa bulan kemarin aku sudah proses produksi lagu baru. Tapi semakin banyak ketemu orang, semakin banyak masukan yang masuk. Akhirnya standar yang aku punya malah ambrol." This shows that the pursuit of a better song is shaped by external inputs about market taste, hooks, audience segment, and digital visibility.

Polkadots experienced performative perfectionism through the burden of maintaining or surpassing previous achievements. After "Tanpa Dirimu" received positive recognition, the informant stated, "Kita harus bikin lagu yang lebih keren dari ini." Aga/Hyndia showed another form of performative perfectionism through creative leadership, where quality standards extend beyond audio production into visual identity, content execution, team coordination, and promotional consistency.

This finding expands the distinction between excellencism and perfectionism (Goulet-Pelletier et al., 2022). It also supports Lin et al. (2023) and Ma et al. (2026), who show that external expectations and digital evaluation may intensify fear of failure, anxiety, and creative pressure. Performative perfectionism therefore arises from the intersection between artistic standards, platform-based evaluative systems, and the need to remain visible in a competitive digital music environment.

3.6 Creative stress in the local digital music ecosystem

The sixth finding shows that creative stress emerges from multiple and overlapping pressures. For Denny Alvian, stress appears in the confusion of standards after receiving many inputs about the market, hooks, song structure, and young audiences. His experience shows that creative stress is produced when artistic decision-making becomes continuously interrupted by market advice, platform expectations, and imagined audience response.

Polkadots experienced creative stress when intensive planning, promotion, collaboration, and production did not produce the expected results. The informant explained, "Aku pernah di titik stres. Karena aku sudah mengagendakan, merencanakan yang sebaik mungkin untuk lagu yang kolaborasi dengan orang, cuma hasilnya itu kurang sesuai harapan." Aga/Hyndia described stress through responsibility for concepts, timelines, technical problems, and team coordination. He stated, "Saat semua yang kami perkirakan sudah berjalan dengan baik, sesuai dengan rencana, sesuai dengan timeline, terus tiba-tiba ada sesuatu di tengah jalan yang bikin itu berubah." These experiences show that creative stress is shaped by uncertain audience response, technical disruption, team responsibility, and platformized work demands.

This stress is not treated as a clinical diagnosis, but as creative pressure produced by platformized music work. This is consistent with Musgrave (2023) and Musgrave et al. (2023), who show that music may support wellbeing while music careers may involve anxiety, precarious work, and uncertain income. It also aligns with Jepson et al. (2024), Zhou et al. (2025), and Arrieta (2025), who suggest that mental health, stress, creativity, and digital visibility should be understood in relation to working conditions and unstable career sustainability.

Table 2. Main findings and analytical interpretation

Theme	Empirical finding	Analytical interpretation
Platform standards	Songs are judged through hooks, visibility, and engagement.	Platformization changes musical quality.
Negotiation	Musicians adapt selectively to	Agency remains within platform

Content and stage	algorithms. Digital content supports offline performance.	governance. Music work moves across digital and physical spaces.
Cover and royalty	Covers promote works but raise royalty issues.	Song value becomes contingent.
Performative perfectionism	Standards extend to visibility and audience approval.	Perfectionism becomes platform-mediated.
Creative stress	Pressure arises from uncertainty and limited support.	Stress reflects platformized creative work.

3.7 Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study extends the platformization of cultural production framework by showing that platformization enters the creative decision-making process of local independent musicians. Platform infrastructures, multisided markets, governance, datafication, and contingent cultural commodities influence how musicians define quality, plan content, negotiate identity, and evaluate career sustainability. This study also positions performative perfectionism as a platform-mediated condition shaped by visibility, audience approval, algorithmic circulation, content trends, and expectations of future success.

Practically, local independent musicians need stronger support in digital promotion, content production, copyright literacy, royalty mechanisms, and creative pressure management. Local music communities, event organizers, cultural institutions, and policymakers can support original works through performance spaces, fairer appreciation, royalty education, and collaborative networks.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that digital platformization transforms not only music distribution but also the meaning of quality, recognition, perfection, and creative pressure among local independent musicians in Purwokerto. The novelty of this study lies in showing how platformization, performative perfectionism, cover culture, royalty uncertainty, and creative stress intersect within a local independent music ecosystem. The findings extend the platformization of cultural production framework by showing that platform infrastructures, multisided markets, governance, datafication, and contingent cultural commodities operate as pressures that shape musical standards, content strategies, audience engagement, and career sustainability. Practically, the study suggests that musicians need stronger support in digital content management, copyright literacy, royalty understanding, audience development, and mental wellbeing. This study is limited by the number of informants and its focus on Purwokerto. Future research may involve event organizers, audiences, royalty institutions, platform actors, or comparative studies across local music ecosystems.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the informants who shared their experiences and reflections on independent music work in Purwokerto. The authors also acknowledge the support of Universitas Harapan Bangsa in the development of this research manuscript.

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